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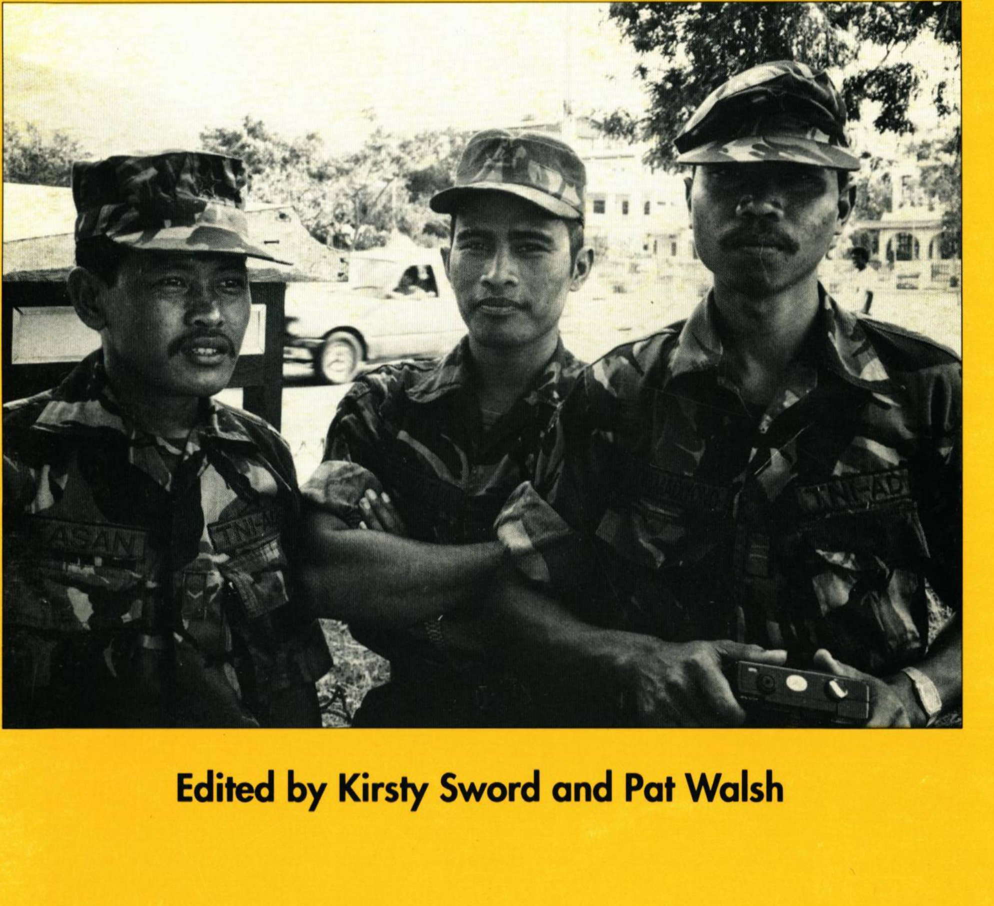
# 'OPENING UP'

## Travellers' Impressions of East Timor 1989-1991



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Edited by Kirsty Sword and Pat Walsh

Australia East Timor Association

# "OPENING UP"

# Travellers' Impressions of East Timor

## 1989 - 1991

**Edited and compiled**
**by**
**Kirsty Sword and Pat Walsh**

Australia East Timor Association
1991

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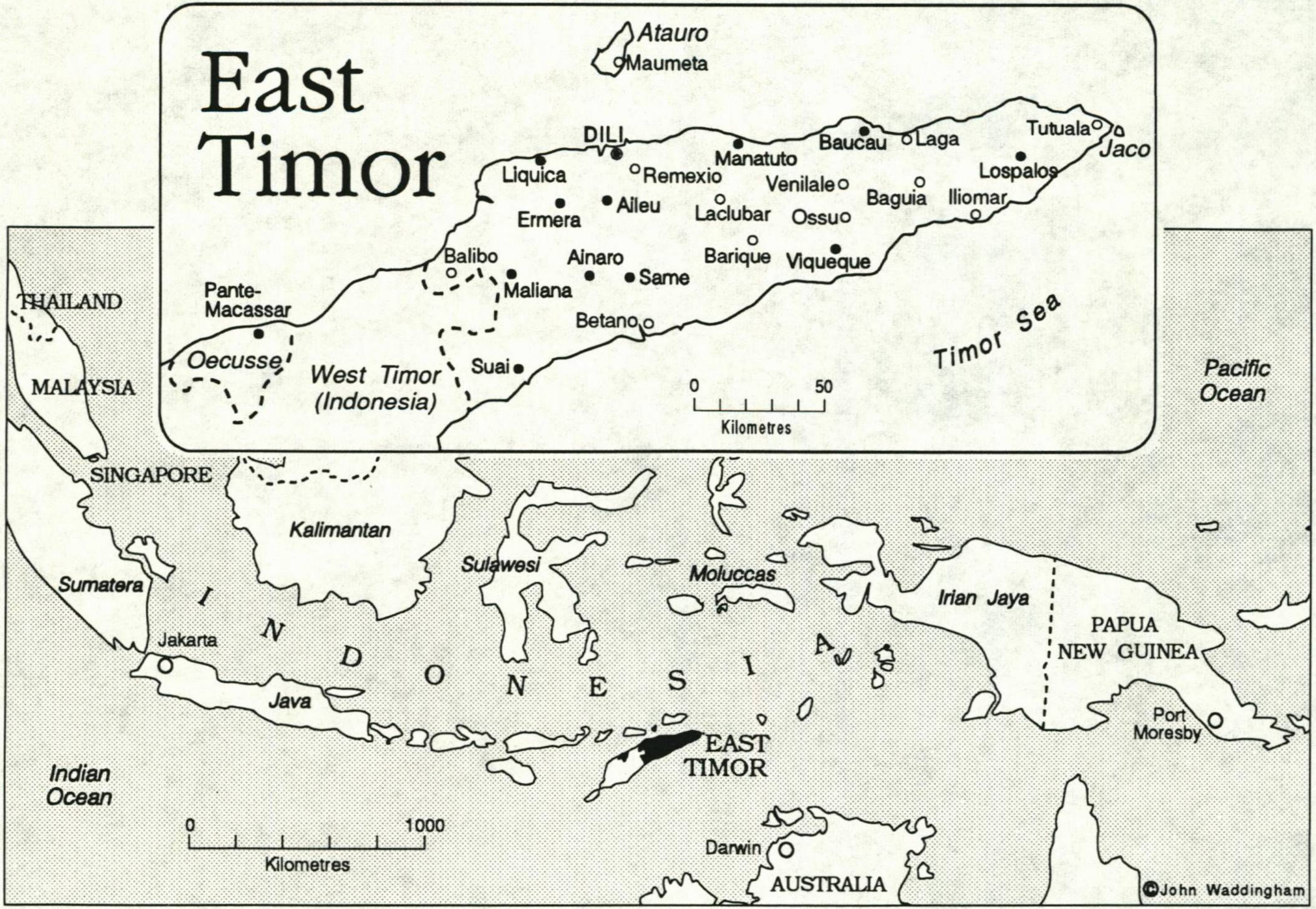
*The Australia East Timor Association was established on 7 December 1975, in Melbourne, Australia, in response to the Indonesian invasion of East Timor. It continues to vigorously promote the UN-recognised right of the East Timorese people to self-determination and to foster community awareness of the issue. It has recently published a pocket dictionary for travellers to East Timor in the local lingua franca, Tetum. For copies of the dictionary and other information on East Timor contact AETA, PO Box 93, Fitzroy 3065, Australia.*


East Timor
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DILI
Liquica
Remexio
Manatuto
Baucau
Laga
Tutuala
Jaco
Lospalos
Venilale
Baguia
Iliomar
Ermera
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Irian Jaya
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Pacific Ocean
Sumatera
INDONESIA
Jakarta
Java
EAST TIMOR
Port Moresby
Indian Ocean
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1000
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Darwin
AUSTRALIA

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# Introduction

On January 1 1989, Indonesia's President Suharto finally overruled his reluctant Generals and opened up East Timor to foreigners. This decision, of course, has nothing to do with allowing the East Timorese greater freedom of association or movement. The motives behind it were partly economic (Jakarta is heavily in debt and hungry for the foreign exchange brought by tourism) and principally political, being part of Indonesia's calculated campaign to improve its very poor human rights image and, in particular, to silence critics who argue that denial of access is part of an elaborate cover-up of the situation in East Timor.

Indeed, from the time of Indonesia's invasion of the former Portuguese colony in 1975, up until the date of the 'opening up', East Timor was a land shrouded in a most sinister silence. Access for individuals, other than a few hand-picked politicians, diplomats and members of the media and church agencies, was severely restricted and, by the same token, documents and other information leaving the territory were subject to stringent controls by the Indonesian authorities, causing obvious problems and delays in the disclosure of cases of military brutality and human rights abuses. Significantly, one of the first actions taken by the occupying forces was the destruction of all telephones and telecommunication links.

The East Timorese people's isolation from individual expressions of solidarity and shared outrage was as complete as their ignorance of the complicity and pragmatism which was, and largely still is, the order of the day at a government level. To a certain extent, little has changed. Letters and documents branded subversive by Indonesia are forced to reach the outside world via an informal and yet highly efficient network of clandestine activists. Representatives of governments and international agencies making official visits to Indonesia's '27th province' are taken on brief guided tours of a limited number of towns and prevented from engaging in frank and uninhibited conversation with the civilian population as a result of vigilant and ever-present Indonesian military escorts (see Labour MP Garrie Gibson's account, page 38). Those travelling simply as tourists, however, are considered to be less of a threat to the cause of the military occupation, and are therefore given a relatively free rein with regards to the people they choose to speak to and the towns they elect to visit. They are undoubtedly the most independent of East Timor's foreign observers.

The first Australian to take advantage of the new policy is said to have been an oil rigger from Darwin who happened to be holidaying in West Timor when the opening up announcement was made. Since that time over 3,000 individuals, most of them from Australia, have travelled to East Timor. Whilst some who are able to make a comparison between pre- and post-invasion years report certain material improvements in life conditions for local people, there is almost unanimous agreement that the principal object of Indonesian development efforts in East Timor is the advancement of Jakarta's economic and military interests. Fear, repression and the swamping of their culture by large numbers of Indonesian transmigrants, are for the East Timorese an everyday reality, and one which few visitors fail to be impressed by.

Travellers' perceptions of East Timor often vary quite markedly according to the length of time spent in the country, their ability to speak Tetum, Portuguese or Indonesian, the presence of travelling companions or East Timorese contacts, and their nationality and sex, amongst other factors. What unites many visitors to East Timor since 1989 has been a desire to record their experiences whilst travelling and, upon their return home, to educate others about the sad fate of this occupied land and people.

Most of the pieces in this compilation are completely unsolicited, and a testimony to the continuing support for East Timor's struggle by sensitive and well-briefed members of the international community. One can only hope that among the toursists and opportunists who will undoubtedly make their way to East Timor in the future, there will continue to be a healthy representation of this kind of traveller. ✈

**Kirsty Sword**
**Pat Walsh**

**November 1991**

## May 1989

# 24 Hours in Dili

***A fleeting visit made by Pat Walsh and another Australian NGO representative in May 1989 was an opportunity to test Indonesia's January 1 decision to allow access, as well as a chance to gain some first hand impressions.***

We were the only Europeans on our nearly full Garuda flight. The other passengers were, as far as I could tell, predominantly Indonesian. One, who seemed to be a courier, wore a military uniform. On arrival in Dili he collected a large, officially sealed, red suit case marked 'State Documents'.

We were impressed by the wide, but largely dry, river courses and the closely packed, precipitous mountains visible below us on the brief flight from Kupang to East Timor. Dili, bordered by blue sea and beaches on the left and mountain foothills on the right as we approached, looked very pretty compared to Kupang whose natural setting is rather barren and featureless.

The sealed road into town led past a large coloured sign bidding us, in Indonesian, welcome to Dili, then over the one way bridge across the Comoro river (its wide waterless bed being mined for sand and stones by small groups of people, presumably for construction materials), past the old airport (now an Indonesian army helicopter base with six TNI choppers to be seen), and along the foreshore road to the Hotel Turismo.

Rooms were allocated in the left wing, the right wing being far too expensive, and after a wash we had a light lunch of *nasi goreng* in the pleasant garden of the Turismo courtyard within earshot of the gentle surf.

Enquiries revealed that, as it was Sunday, Mass would be celebrated at 4:00 pm at the Motael church. As the church was visible on the foreshore across the other side of the bay, we decided to walk and say hello to anyone along the way.

Shaded by one of the huge banyan trees which line the waterfront, some fishing people from Baucau were mending nets on the grass outside a tin humpy. Back along the street, Indonesian soldiers grouped at the gate of their military compound watched us pass. Apart from the stationary helicopters we saw on our way in to town from the airport, these soldiers were the only evidence of a military presence we saw that day. To all outward appearances Dili could have been a sleepy backwater where nothing much ever happened.

We arrived at the church at 3:50 expecting to be able to get a seat inside. Instead pre-Mass devotions were already in full swing and the congregation overflowed into the front yard. Mass followed, the fourth that day in that church, one of several in Dili.

That evening as we were leaving the hotel to eat, we were introduced to Vic Russell, a portly Australian who was visiting Dili for the weekend with his private secretary, a young Eurasian woman from Kupang. Vic explained he owned a mine in Western Australia and had mining and tourist interests in West Timor. He was obviously taking advantage of the opening up to check out East Timor's tourist potential, mindful that East Timor under Portugal was a popular tourist destination for Australians and that both the tourists and the Indonesian government were looking for new locations to meet the overflow from Bali. Vic expressed considerable satisfaction with what he had seen of the highly scenic coast east of Dili that afternoon.

Later that night Vic confided that if we were to go out of Dili the next day we should have someone from 'the Fretilin' with us because things were still hot in the interior. Seventy Indonesian troops had been killed some weeks ago and a further ten or so more recently.

The following day, along Dili's foreshore, an unnerving scene presented itself. In broad daylight on one of Dili's main streets, some 15-20 Indonesian soldiers from the compound we had passed the previous afternoon, were beating up one of their colleagues. Stripped to his green pants and suspended by soldiers holding his wrists and feet, the victim struggled as soldiers in heavy boots kicked his unprotected body. Clearly shaken, our Timorese driver suggested in Indonesian that he may be a thief. People stood watching from a distance up and down the street.

Further along police were loading a motor cycle onto a utility.

To gain an overview, we asked to be taken to the hills behind Dili. The road took us past Comarca prison, its high thick walls set back off the road and partly obscured by trees and vegetable gardens.

This area was also the other Dili, as distinct from the central business district near the water, where Becora market is situated and many of the people live. As we drove a group of sweating Indonesian soldiers, stripped to the waist and holding guns, jogged down the centre of the road. The choice of venue for this drill - in the middle of 'residential' Dili, was hardly accidental.

Reflecting on the visit and discussing it with Indonesian NGOs, two conclusions forced themselves on us. First, if one did not know what questions to ask and who to ask them of, and if one could not quickly establish trust with informants, it would be tragically easy to learn nothing and draw false conclusions.

Second, it would also be tragically simple to visit Dili (which is not East Timor) on a Sunday, stay in a hotel in the business district (and therefore be physically and socially removed from the people), see nothing out of the ordinary and conclude that everything is normal.

From this glimpse it was clear to us that despite the improved access, the situation even in Dili is still far from normal and the 'East Timor question' is still that - a question mark. ✈

## July 1989

### Trouble in 'Tim Tim'

*The threat of ferocious, man-hunting beasts was just one of the ploys the Indonesian authorities adopted to restrict the movement of the British author of the following account.*

"I cannot guarantee safety of you in these regions", the well-meaning police officer warned. He pointed to the highlands on my simple little map. The mountainous region of Viqueque fell under his jurisdiction. "Dangerious" he added, supplying an extra vowel as emphasis, thus marring his otherwise excellent English.

The police officer's admonition was the first intimation that East Timor might not be as open as the cheery encouragement of his colleagues in the capital, Dili, had led me to believe. To substantiate his claim, my host cited the incident involving an American who went missing and was believed to have been devoured by a Komodo Dragon.

"But Komodo Dragons are unknown in Timor", I insisted.
"Oh yes", he conceded ingenuously. "This happened in Komodo".

Well-intentioned it may have been, but the Komodo Dragon deterrent only succeeded in bringing to mind the programme of misinformation propagated by the Indonesians in the months before the invasion, under the code name *Operasi Komodo*. At another police station a whole vaudeville of growls and snarls was produced by an office full of policemen trying to put me off with the preposterous suggestion that lions and tigers would be lurking in the highland forests. When this did not wash, hissing poisonous snakes were added to the pantomime.

Eventually, pressed for a more plausible explanation of Timor's dangers, the lieutenant explained that the very hills I intended to traverse were the last hideout of the Fretilin.

In an attempt to circumvent these obstructive police posts, I tried to approach the mountain village of Laclubar from Dili itself. Only one other foreigner is said to have reached Laclubar in the last 14 years. He was a representative for Total Oil. My interest in this village was actually stimulated by spotting a thick, coarse black rug woven, I was informed, from the bark fibres of a tree. No one could tell me how the fabric was arrived at. The style was so out of keeping with the usual bright woven traditional designs on the rest of the island, that I felt impelled to discover something about the character of these remote mountain people. Armed with only my *parang* (a finely shaped local machete) and an inadequate map torn from an Indonesian school atlas, I knew I would need guides somewhere along my trek.

The half day uphill walk to the coffee producing village of Remexio was steep but ultimately rewarding: barely 15 kilometres from the capital of East Timor I was greeted as the first foreigner to have ventured this way since the days of Portugese rule. Coffee, along with sandalwood, was the major source of revenue for the Portuguese half of Timor, and Dili coffee was highly prized. When the Indonesians unilaterally adopted the ex-colony as the '27th province' of the Indonesian Republic, their next step was to ensure that the twin trades were placed under the control of experienced associates of the military. The official reason for divesting the local Timorese of their own trade was that the locals lacked management expertise. This might well have been true, but it is equally true to say that by controlling Timor's only export revenue, the Indonesians had a stranglehold on any local financial support that might have found its way to Fretilin.

The local bobby in Remexio cheerfully enquired in English where I might be headed and, on my reply, equally cheerfully waved me off with the words

"Please go!". Otherwise I was addressed by the villagers in Portugese. Old men doffed their hats, bobbing their heads with a quick *"Bom dia"*. Some diverged from their path to reverentially shake a hand, or even kiss it. Women would sidle past with a crimson smile of *"Boa tarde"*.

It felt strange to be the first representative of their colonial past that these highland people had seen in half a generation. Mandarines were offered me at one village - "We have so plenty"; and a rich ripe paw paw was offered at another. I was so hungry I devoured it there and then. Sensing my obvious enjoyment, the villagers rushed off to find me another.

When I finally made the outlying village of Fatuberliu I was met by a one-eyed Babinsa. From the name you might leap to the conclusion that this is some wild and fearsome snake, or even a misplaced witch from the forests of Slavonia. It is neither. The Babinsa is the Timorese Home Guard. The corporal's left eye was clouded over by cataracts, rendering it out of commission. So making use of his right eye to take snaps of the villagers with my Pentax came quite naturally.

The secure homeliness of Fatuberliu could not last for ever. The Babinsa's bonhomie belied his concern for the need to report to his seniors. He loped off to report the arrival of the malai (foreigner) to his Komandant in Lequidoe. His radio earpiece was amplified comically by an open-ended sardine tin. The sound was enhanced to such a degree that the villagers who crowded around his tiny shuttered office could not fail to make out the argument that was now ensuing between our one-eyed Babinsa and his master. I was the only one left in the dark, but felt I was making good enough headway with the *kepala* (chief) of the village, who provided me with two guides, Gregorio and Juliao, quite gratis - "because they would like to" - to reach the penultimate village on my highland hike to Laclubar: Turiscai. One-eyed Babinsa emerged from his control room to announce that I would have to make my way to Lequidoe before I ventured further inland. As he was unable to provide a satisfactory reason for this reversal, I pointed out I had no intention of going back north when my aim was to head south to Turiscai. After much haranguing on the sardine tin, the Babinsa's Komandant apparently capitulated and it was announced that the command unit would be making its way to me, rather than me to it. From the cheer that went up among the villagers it seemed they must have laboured under the Indonesian imposed bureaucracy many a time before. Also their eyes lit up at the possibilities promised by a minor *konfrontasi* between the white man and the army.

My chief interrogator was from Bali. This no longer came as a surprise. Half the police force in East Timor is from Bali. Although generally a genial roundfaced people, the Balinese failed to get off on the right footing when I expressed insufficient admiration of his home island.
"Too many tourists", I insisted.
"But Bali *cantik* (beautiful)!" he wailed.
"Yes, but excessive numbers of tourists not so", I countered.

The desire to get "off the beaten track" is not one which finds much response in the Balinese who are used to an overcrowded home. So my desire to reach Laclubar by a rarely traversed path was quite unfathomable. There had to be another reason why I was here. And they were quite determined to spend what was left of the night finding it out.

I ran through the names of the villages I had passed on my way to Fatuberliu. "Alone?" he asked, when I had to explain that I had camped out on the previous night.
"No".
"Then who with?"
"Five horses".
My audience, sensing the mounting antagonism between the two adversaries, gave out appreciative giggles.

The customary pattern of dissuasion was attempted first. The chief argument was that the route from Fatuberliu to Turiscai was made difficult by an unfordable river. I could hardly rely on my school atlas map to corroborate this, but if this river was so impassable, why would two guides offer to take me that way? And in the dry season? Pursuing his line of argument, my interrogator made a counter offer: I would be escorted to the town of Aileu from where I could reach Turiscai by a safe road via Maubisse. As civilly as I could, but playing to my audience all the while, I refused to acquiesce without a sound reason. It was never given.

By now we were in the second hour of cross-questioning. What an arts festival organizer could find to do in the hills of Timor was clearly beyond them. To admit to being a writer of any kind was not a good idea. That profession is synonymous with journalist.

To my relief, the next morning my Balinese inspector was nowhere to be found. My prospective guides had also disappeared. Presented with this fait accompli, I was obliged to be guided by an armed escort of four Babinsa to Aileu after all. Needless to say, once in Aileu there was no question of being allowed to continue to Maubisse as promised. The police, quite charmingly, insisted I return to Dili and secure a *surat izin jalan* (permit). That was the first time I had heard of the need for one.

The *surat izin* was relatively easy to get hold of. Confident that nothing could now stand in the way of my progress, I leapt on a truck headed for Maubisse. It was Sunday, traditionally market and cockfighting day throughout Indonesia. News travels fast in East Timor. I quickly became known as the Laclubar Man. People pointed me out and shook their heads as I made my way into the hills east towards Turiscai the next morning, July 17.

I turned past the immense cement dome that is the roadside station in honour of the Virgin Mary high above Turiscai. A clamour of drums and cymbals reached my ears from the valley floor. The villagers of Turiscai were celebrating *Hari Integrasi,* the anniversary of the forceful integration of East Timor into Indonesia. One of the sons of the former prince of Turiscai was one of the founding fathers of the Fretilin, Xavier do Amaral. He had escaped from the Indonesians in 1976 very much along the route I would have taken from Fatuberliu.

As I descended from the pass down into the village, every house was capped with the red and white of the flag of Indonesia. In the volley-ball grounds the men and women, draped in colourful *tais*, headbands, and in the case of the menfolk, horse hair anklets, formed themselves into spokes of a large wheel and danced in this circular motion. As I appeared along the dusty road, the clanging of gongs and rattles stopped. Every man, woman and child ran to the edge of the field to look at the intruder. (They can't be that devoted to the *Hari Integrasi*, I thought). I was paraded up to the local police station. The local policeman was surprisingly not from Bali but from neighbouring Java. My arrival might have been unprecedented but cannot have been unexpected. The Dili and Maubisse police must have been on the sardine tin days ago. Thus we established my aims for reaching Laclubar by the direct mountain route and wheels were put in motion to find me two guides. On issue of my permit I had promised to hire two guides in Turiscai. And lo! the next morning there appeared two guides ready to take me. When I established that they did not expect payment I should have been happy. But the huddle they and the policeman had been in shortly before our departure made me suspicious. This was my fifth attempt to reach Laclubar and now it seemed all too easy.

The route to Laclubar had been pointed out to me on the day before. When we set off a different way I was on my guard, but as we could easily have curved round east again, I did not voice my concern just then. It was only after 45 minutes of resolutely heading southwest that I called a halt.

"This is not the way to Laclubar now, is it?" It was difficult not to sound imperious. The first guide made signs as if to protest that we were on the right route.

"How do you propose we reach Laclubar in the east if we keep on heading in the opposite direction?" I rejoindered.

A shifting about in wellington boots followed. And then a meek, "Well, we are going to Laclubar. But via Same." Same was the main town of the southern province, four days walk out of our way.

My next question was really superfluous. "The police have put you up to this, haven't they?"

They did not like to admit it.

I was not too stern with my `guides', but rather reserved my strength for the next *konfrontasi*.

On my last day in Dili I encountered Senhor Morato, Head of Protocol for the Governor. He was currently giving the Papal Envoy a tour of East Timor in preparation for His Holiness's visit to this far flung outpost of Roman Catholicism in October. I relayed my problem in getting to Laclubar. "Next time you come", he insisted, "you get in touch and I will arrange everything for you." And I recalled as I had passed through Turiscai a large rectangular field of dark coffee beans had been laid out on the road to dry in the sun. In the middle of the oblong on the road was a totally naked baby boy, as brown as the berries he was playing on. I could not help but smile. Whatever the frustrations caused by the administration imposed on these people by the Indonesians, the charm of the indigenous population cannot be quenched.✈

# September 1989

## Life on the Edge

***The writer of the following account was struck on her travels by the economic and social marginalisation of the East Timorese people and by the important role played by the native clergy in upholding their human and cultural rights.***

At the immigration desk, passengers are met by smiling Mr Carlos, who works for Indonesian Intelligence and who speaks remarkably fluent English. Mr Carlos is pleasantly frank about his activities and pays one frequent visits at the Hotel Turismo just when one is most unsuspecting.

For me one of the biggest problems was that you never knew whether you spoke to friend or foe, which made it difficult to be relaxed with the people around you or to discuss the situation more or less openly. Even a probably harmless question by the waiter about tomorrow's plans makes you cagey.

A great concern, widely articulated, was the blatantly obvious marginalisation of the East Timorese in their own country. This starts with the taxi drivers who either seem to be from Sulawesi or West Timor, but rarely East Timor, and the *warung* (stall) owners, down to shopkeepers (Chinese from Surabaya). The Hotel Turismo is now owned by an Indonesian. The new Vice Governor is Indonesian. Even relations between Indonesian and Timorese Catholics are strained and lack of mutual trust is a big problem. One of the clergy put it this way: "They are probably here to spy on us. Our mentality, our perspective on life is so totally different from theirs; we are totally incompatible".

It seems priests are the only ones the population has confidence in to tell of their distressing plight and of the gross injustices they are subjected to by the Indonesian military forces. After meetings with the priests I felt sometimes quite sick, outraged, helpless and always overcome with humility. What I was very impressed with was their noble, fighting spirit, and their indomitable courage to resist and fight this oppression, rather than become cynical and drown.

The bus drive to Suai took about 10 hours. Timor from the bus window seemed like one mass grave. Massive, large wooden crosses on top of hill crests, in the villages, on wind-swept plains. In Maubisse the crosses seemed to be piled on top of each other and reaching out into the road. It seems there must have been heavy fighting.

In Zumalai the bus stopped and I took the opportunity to talk to some children and their mothers. It turned out that these were Balinese transmigrants from the transmigration sites in Beco and Zumalai. A little further I saw the first Balinese-style temples at the edge of rice paddies.

The road to Zumalai and Beco was really bad and so full of atrocious potholes you could not travel faster than 25-30 kmh; so don't take too much notice of Indonesia's claims of 'development' of Portugal's badly neglected former colony: certainly no visible development down in the south in the form of bridges, roads or even the simplest form of road maintenance.

In Suai I attended various villages' dance performances. A Timorese tried to explain the significance of the dances to me, lamenting that East Timor had lost all of its culture, music, dance, and old people who would be able to remember the meaning and the words of their traditional heritage. Everything had been lost during the war; their statues, jewellery, traditional houses, the very fabric of the clans and tribes. Knowledge (medical, taboos, songs, kinship, ancestry etc) had been the property of individuals who were no longer there to pass it on to the next generation.

The Suai region suffers poverty and hunger, with people coming to the church to beg for food, and although the area is rife with malaria, there is no medicine to prevent it.

One afternoon, a group of six businessmen from Melbourne arrived to inspect the beaches of Dili for potential tourist development. They had their eyes on the lovely white sands of Dili's most famous beach - Areia Branca - where they want to buy land to set up an enormous hotel complex. Elegant looking Chinese businessmen from Surabaya were conducting the negotiations regarding Timorese land. The ones you never saw were the East Timorese people handling their own affairs, being involved in business and determining their own future and prosperity. This question of the marginalisation of the native people of East Timor in their own country cannot be emphasised enough.✈

VIA CRUCIS
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*Street salesman in Dili, East Timor, 1991 (Photograph: Hugh O'Shaughnessy)*

# October 1989

## The Plight of Women in East Timor

*In October 1989, Shirley Shackleton travelled to East Timor to investigate the situation of the people. Her husband, newsman Greg Shackleton, along with four colleagues (two Australians, one New Zealander and one British), were alive when Indonesian units attacked Balibo on October 17, 1975. According to a CIA report, the attacking troops were to wear 'uniforms without insignia and to carry older, soviet-made weapons so as not to be identified as Indonesian regulars'.*[1] *When the attack was over the newsmen were reported 'missing'. They are still officially 'missing'. Before she returned to Australia, Shirley Shackleton succeeded in making the hazardous journey to Balibo where she planted a tree in memory of her husband.*

On my third day in Dili an old man sat next to me in a park. Without looking at me he began to speak. "Balibo, sorry", he said. "Before, Portugal, bad; now, Indonesia, bad. Soldier fights boys, things sale bad made, cheap made; hospital Indonesian sisters. Before, hospital get medicine, now medicine in chemist shop; have money you buy, get well; no money, die, no medicine in hospital". Still looking straight ahead, he stood to go. "We are waiting for Mr Xanana", he said.

After three weeks in East Timor the strongest impression was the complete division between the two races, especially the women. The ones who are thin, bare-foot, walking in the dust of the road, carrying heavy objects on their heads or on a stick slung over their shoulders, are Timorese; the ones who wear beautiful clothes and have smooth, glossy hair, the ones who are overly plump and ride in cars or taxis, are Indonesian.

I found it hard to interview Timorese women. Indeed it was hard to interview any Timorese unless the interview could be conducted in secrecy. But one woman who is to direct a program in which Timorese women are to be included and which will feature health care and women's rights, agrees to speak with me. This high born and highly educated Portuguese woman had the demeanour of a little girl. When I first met her I noticed that she only spoke when spoken to and then she seemed to fold into herself and look up at one from hooded eye lids, which she fluttered seductively.

Where did she train for the job? The eyelashes flutter as she whispers, "Jakarta".

How many women have jobs like hers in East Timor? "Two, but many more work for the Indonesian Red Cross and some work as clerks in banks".

What percentage work in banks? "A few".

When I press her for accuracy, she says defensively, "Five percent, I think, but some Indonesian women work".

Why so few East Timorese women in good jobs? "The education level is too low".

How many Timorese women are there in East Timor? "How many women?", she says hesitantly. "I don't know".

The difference in housing is very marked. Indonesians live in neat little European houses with electricity and running water, with floor coverings and furniture; the Timorese houses are assembled from dried palm stalks or packing cases. They have no electricity and the only time they get running water is when it rains. They are completely bereft of possessions; the people sit aimlessly on dirt floors. The Timorese housing seems sub-standard. I ask if this is so. She hesitates again, curling up like a cat and, after a pause, shrugs, "I don't know".

How do women who live in those houses manage when they give birth - are there any services for them? She looks perplexed. Why do I get the feeling that this program she is to head will provide jobs for educated Portuguese-Timorese women but will rarely aid the East Timorese poor?

The man who arranged the meeting says rather abruptly, "We have to be going now". Later, when he comes to see me, he says "Isabel couldn't possibly have known the answers to those questions you asked. She wouldn't concern herself with native births. The women have their babies at home and infant mortality is very high".

"Then why is she head of a department to assist those women?".

"It's still in the planning stages, but it's a start and it has been designed to include women's point of view. There is a clean water project and many women will be taught traditional skills - sewing, for example. The Indonesians go in for projects that look good", he says, "but at least they're trying".

I tell him of an Australian woman I know who donated one hundred dollars to a hospital in West Timor for surgery for children with hare lips. She was amazed and delighted to discover that the woman who ran the health service flew in a team of specialists from Jakarta and about thirty children received surgery. She had photographs of all the kids in the waiting room. She speaks highly of the Indonesian health service in West Timor and she is amazed at the number of kids her money saved.

He gives me a wry look. "Sorry to disillusion you", he says. "That is a perfect example of the misuse of huge amounts of money. Your friend's contribution wouldn't have made the slightest difference. That was part of a huge program by Governor Ben Mboi's wife who happened to be a doctor. Nafsiah Mboi's pet project was hare lips. It cost millions in aid money and is typical of the kind of projects the Indonesians love -ones with a high visibility of success, like roads and bridges". He sighed. "The good they do is minimal when you think what they cost. They don't serve the great bulk of the people because they don't improve the standard of living".

"But the kids who received that treatment will live transformed lives", I say, not wanting to lose the cosy feeling the story has always given me.

"Then they should be catered for by the existing health system, instead of providing a sensational public relations stunt".

I visited Dano, a village not far from Dili. Women and children sat dejectedly on the dirt floors of their houses or on the ground outside. They looked as though they were not the kind of people one could help.

The car had stopped at an empty shelter and I was motioned to alight. A sound caused me to turn around. What I saw amazed me - all the women of the village were running towards me, expressions of joy on their faces. They were carrying their babies and young children and they were clutching plastic bags. When one woman fell sprawling, they all stopped to help her before continuing to run at break-neck speed towards me.

As they rushed into the small shelter they were talking excitedly and smiling at me. Those dejected faces were quite transformed into lively, beautiful women. In no time at all they had the contents of the plastic bags spread upon the ground. These were exquisitely hand woven objects, most of which were useless containers - a cover for a match-box, a small purse, a container for a comb. I was appalled. I had very little money with me because the bank had been closed when I left Dili and that is the only place in East Timor where one can cash a traveller's cheque. The prices for the intricate work were low. An object of similar skill and intricacy on sale at the Melbourne Meat Market made by an Australian craft worker would have to sell for at least three hundred dollars. These were on sale for between thirty seven cents and three dollars. I wanted to buy everything, but I had neither the cash nor the inclination to insult them. Pride in their work was the one thing they seemed to have left, so I chose very carefully the most skilled pieces and, much to their amazement, I gave them the first price they asked. They are obviously used to being haggled down. It was a painful business. The money obviously meant so much to them, yet they didn't push in front of each other or demand my attention, and when someone's work was selected, they oohed and ahhed in appreciation, congratulating the lucky person with generous praise.

The experience still haunts me. People with skills like theirs should be working with pure silk in clean work areas, not sitting aimlessly on dirt.

On the morning I was to leave, the old man who had spoken to me on the third day of my visit was waiting outside my room in the garden. He came forward and put his arms around me. "Thank you for coming", he said. He had tears in his eyes. He was not known to any of my contacts so I think he had heard of my visit and had taken the dangerous chance of speaking.

It *was* dangerous. I secretly made fun of the undercover men and the collaborators to keep my spirits up, but everywhere I went I was warned to be careful by people who had no humour left in them. "They can't even cry any more", a priest told me. "They just exist one day at a time". ✈

(Excerpted from 'Resignation and Resistance', originally published in the Melbourne *Age*, 3/11/89)

1. *Timor, A People Betrayed*, James Dunn. Published by Jacaranda Press.

# October 1989

## Travelling to Dili to See the Pope

*In the lead up to the Papal visit to East Timor in mid-October 1989, Indonesian security forces grew significantly in number and determination to quell dissent. Travelling to Dili two days prior to the celebration of the Papal mass, Chris McMahon relates his experience of heightened Indonesian sensitivities at this time.*

Oecussi. Up at 6 for the 6.30am bus to Dili. The locals have been consulted. All agree that the bus will stop to collect me at the *losmen*; even the Timorese policeman who stopped by for a chat at 11.00pm last night. At 6.45am the Chinese proprietor of the *losmen* observes that none have come to the losmen but that all have left for Dili. "Tomorrow" is her first suggestion. "But I must go today", I insist. "Maybe you can go with that truck", she suggests.

It is soon arranged. The truck, hired by Anwar, a Javanese chemist from Dili, has just made its first delivery to this western part of East Timor. While the Timorese driver, Johannes, attends the police station to get the required *surat jalan*, Anwar and Teos, the driver's off-sider, help the inquisitive tourist with Tetum. "I already have many Timorese friends", Anwar announces proudly. "I was animistic before I converted to Islam", reveals Teos, the off-sider from Lospalos with an equal exhibition of pride. Those who speak of East Timor's integration into Indonesia would be happy indeed to hear such agreeable talk.

Johannes returns with the *surat jalan*, and we leave Oecussi in high spirits. The coastal road takes us back into West Timor. It is a tourist's paradise - thatched huts, white sandy beaches and mountains that rise out of the sea are a photographer's delight. We stop several times as this is the first trip any of us have made on this road and we must follow the tracks left by this morning's buses. At one stage we have to make a choice - to the left is the beach road; ahead a track winding up through the mountains, and to the right a track heading inland. We turn right. The track meanders through a pocket of thriving vegetation due to re-growth following recent bushfires. The banana and palm forest is thick enough to obstruct our vision of the road ahead. The track comes to and end so we turn back. We try the mountain track which is too steep for our truck to negotiate. By a system of elimination (and a tip from a passer-by), we head back to the coastal road. A huge fish trap which looks like a bamboo oil-rig sits several hundred metres out from the shore, and large cane salt 'sieves' are fine examples of appropriate technology in a place where President Suharto's hand of development has yet to reach.

We are hailed by villagers not long after leaving Wini. The driver agrees to carry 40 of the villagers' cane wall panels to Dili. "We cannot grow food here so we make walls", a woman explains. The driver is pleased to have picked up some extra business. "Since 'independence' it is much easier to make money", he says enthusiastically, though not with much conviction. The conversation is likely to be safe when your Javanese employer sits beside you, no matter how reasonable or likeable he or she might be.

At Silaba, now called Batugade, we re-enter East Timor and the reality of life in an occupied territory is quickly upon us. We alight from the truck, the tourist with his passport and Teos with his papers. The tourist is shown customary courtesy and the Timorese is asked to pay the customary bribe. It seems that although the police office issued an exit permit which enabled us to leave East Timor at Oecussi, it did not issue a permit allowing us to re-enter East Timor at Silaba. The Javanese police officer asks for and receives 5000 rupiah, and Johannes seems satisfied that sufficient *retribusi* has been paid. Within minutes we are stopped again, this time at an official police checkpoint in Motaain. The police officer, Ketut, a transmigrant from Bali, is quite amicable towards the tourist, but soon lashes out at Teos, kicking him in the leg and hitting him several times in the midriff and head. Teos does not resist but stands with head bowed until knocked to the ground. "You call me stupid!", Ketut screams threateningly as Teos picks himself up again. "Why did you hit him?", the tourist asks, hoping to prevent any further violence. Ketut repeats the claim that Teos spoke unkindly to him. Later Teos reveals that he was beaten up for offering cigarettes instead of money. "If you were a policeman in Australia and you beat someone up like that you could be put in prison", the tourist ventures. "It is normal here", Ketut replies. "The Timorese people do not have discipline. They must learn", he adds, though his eyes betray the hypocrisy of his words.

Teos lies on the grass and appears to be concussed. Ketut's attention turns to Anwar, Johannes and other passengers the truck has picked up on the way. He seethes with contempt while interrogating a middle aged Timorese man whose I.D. has been liquid papered over since his occupation changed from village head to street vendor. The old man understands little Indonesian which further enrages Ketut. After a long hour, Teos hands over 10,000 rupiah. The threat of jail is removed, and after a group photo in which Teos squats at the feet which kicked him so recently, we are allowed to leave. Still Johannes and Anwar defend the system. They contend that the bribes are a form of retribution because the wooden wall panels have been taken from the environment and the money will be used to help the immediate community!

The next checkpoint is staffed by a Timorese police officer. There is no drama as Johannes explains the predicament and the police officer agrees to help. For a mere 5,000 rupiah he writes a letter which may make the rest of our journey less expensive.

We decide to head inland and up toward Balibo. There is an eerie stillness and few people wave back as the tourist passes by. The policemen at the checkpoint are interested in talking to the tourist only. "You should return to the coastal road", the chief officer suggests. "There is little transport from here to Dili and entry into Dili will be prohibited from tomorrow" (security measure for the Papal visit). The tourist explains that he already has a lift and bids the kind officers good day. The mass graves by the roadside as we leave Balibo are testimony to the terror both past and present. We cross the Be Bol river and in the failing light press on towards Maliana. "They are all transmigrants from Bali", Johannes and Anwar explain, motioning towards the farmers returning home from their fields. The next check-point is indeed staffed almost exclusively by Balinese, but fortunately 'sing ken ken' (no problem). "It is easier at night as the policemen's families are also at the check-points and the policemen are not as hard".

Anwar, Teos and Johannes become more concerned as we reach Maliana. "You will eat here" they insist, showing me to the door of a restaurant which bears photos of not only Suharto and Sudharmono, but also of a favourite son who has reached officer status with the army. All is understood as the officer himself appears and renews his acquaintance with Anwar and Johannes. On the outskirts of Maliana we enter a military barracks which serves also as a check-point. There is an overwhelming sensation of evil and Anwar and Johannes appear most fearful as we walk down the dimly lit road towards a large group of soldiers. Even the tourist decides that playing the fool is not likely to crack the icy stares that warn us to keep our distance and stand below the level of the commanding officer. Still, we depart unscathed. "We were most frightened about that check-point", said Anwar. "The soldiers there are very hard".

With the coming of the wet season, the surrounding hills glow from fires lit by Timorese villagers in order to prepare seeds and soil for the rains. "You can see the people lack discipline", Anwar claims. Johannes watches the road. "Remember when we had to choose whether to drive through the banana and palm forest, climb the hill or take the beach road?" asks the tourist. Anwar nods. "Remember how thick that forest was even though a fire had been through there not long ago? That's good farming", the tourist concludes. Anwar offers no reply. Johannes nods with approval when Anwar is not watching.

At Ermera the police must be woken. The junior officer wakes the second in charge who goes off to wake the commanding officer. After checking that we have fewer than 10 passengers and the goods we are carrying, we are waved on. We arrive in Dili just after the midnight curfew (security procedure during the Papal visit). The joint army and police check-point is immediately next to the camping grounds for the faithful thousands who have come to see the Pope. We pass without trouble.

Tasi Tolu, the large field 15 kms from Central Dili where the Pope will say Mass in two days, basks in the moonlight. According to Bishop Belo it was the place where many, many people died, and now it has been divided into areas according to the different *kabupatens* in East Timor. If dissent is shown on Thursday it will be easily pinpointed to a place for future reference. All along the route from Tasi Tolu to Central Dili are Indonesian flags and signs welcoming the Pope to Indonesia's 27th province. The Pope is being used. The faithful thousands are being used. We are stopped by a man who rides on the back of the truck for a few blocks. "Intel", Johannes explains. It is later reported that in addition to the 13,000 military normally stationed in East Timor, an additional 30,000 are here for security reasons during the Papal visit. Security, like justice, can only come through peace and respect. Such security is still just a flicker of hope in the hearts of the Timorese people. ✈

## January 1990

### Demonstrations in Dili: A Tourist's Observations

***On January 17, 1990 a pro-indenpendence demonstration by East Timorese students was staged at the Hotel Turismo in Dili in the presence of the visiting US Ambassador, John Monjo. After Monjo's departure, Indonesian security forces attacked the students, seriously injuring several of them. Despite this repression, the demonstrators took to the streets again on January 18 and 19.***

***The following account comes from an Australian tourist who arrived in Dili on the afternoon of January 17, after the first demonstration but in time to observe the demonstrations that followed.***

I arrived in Dili at about 1 pm on Wednesday January 17. After a very long delay at the airport another visitor and myself began the 3-4 kilometre journey from Comoro airport to the city. The trip began quietly enough, but as we approached the city centre, I sensed an increased level of tension in our taxi. A number of military vehicles carrying personnel cradling automatic weapons overtook the taxi heading in the direction of my intended destination, the Hotel Turismo.

My co-passenger and the driver exchanged brief, rapid conversation, causing shadows of concern and apprehension on the until now friendly face beside me. My questions were met with a silencing finger to the mouth and a definite shaking of the head.

The driver decided to approach the Hotel Turismo by a back street but was turned away by a group of police. His third attempt, from the direction of White Sands beach, was also unsuccessful.

This time an officer came to the car and requested that my co-passenger explain why we were there. As she answered, I saw through the rear window helmeted police with riot shields in position advancing slowly in a human barricade across the road.

I was informed in basic Indonesian that I would be taken to another hotel, the New Resende Inn. I was to wait there until the officer returned to see me safely to the Turismo.

However, after waiting nearly two hours I decided to make my own way to the Hotel Turismo along the deserted esplanade along the waterfront. I passed only soldiers but then came upon small groups of people huddled together outside what turned out to be the Bishop's house.

They were talking quietly amongst themselves while other people pressed against a high mesh fence, calling earnestly to people inside the grounds of the Bishop's house. Looking inside I saw countless young people with bandages on their heads and upper limbs. They were being attended to by nuns and lay people. Many of the bandages were blood-stained.

The following day, January 18, I came across a large crowd of people in a circle outside the Bishop's house. In the centre of this crowd were seated youths who I believed had taken part in the previous day's demonstration. It appeared to be a conciliatory meeting involving the students, a policeman and some nuns and priests. Prayers were said and hymns sung before the crowd voluntarily dispersed.

On the afternoon of the following day, Friday January 19, while returning from a walk, I saw a large and vocal demonstration of some 150-200 people coming from the direction of the Governor's office towards the shopping centre in Dili.

The participants appeared to be predominantly male and to be aged 16-19. There were also several young women of about the same age and some children about 12 years old as well as some older males. The leaders and a few demonstrators had concealed their faces with pieces of cloth, presumably to avoid recognition.

Standing with a group of silent onlookers, I took a number of photos of the approaching demonstrators. Those in the front line held banners written in Portuguese, Tetum and English. Those in English read: "Timor for East Timorese", "Rights and Justice". As the crowd approached, a young masked man stood confrontingly inches in front of me, angrily talking in either Portuguese or Tetum. Raising his arms skyward, he shook them violently. I was not sure whether he was threatening me or not and was quite shaken. However, on looking at the bystanders, I received reassuring nods and smiles.

As far as I could see, there were only three police vehicles in attendance which I found perplexing knowing that demonstrations are illegal. Realising that I had been watched by people in a government vehicle on the opposite side of the street, I decided to return to the hotel as quickly as possible. I feared that if the film was confiscated, many of those in the photographs could be subjected to reprisals and that I was putting them at risk by my actions. The film, however, remained in my possession. ✈

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WELCOME

*Pope John Paul II being welcomed to the '27th province' by Governor Mario Carrascalao, October 1989 (Photograph: L'Osservatore Romano)*

# April 1990

## Paddy Returns to Timor

***Paddy Kenneally's return to East Timor in April 1990 brought back vivid memories of the very different time he spent there as a member of the Australian 2/2nd Company from December 1941 to December 1942.***

June 1990. Today is the 46th anniversary of 'D' Day, the code sign for the landing by allied troops on the beaches of Normandy. No mention on any of our radio stations of the events that took place on 6th June, 1944. I'm beginning to think the people of 1990 are about as knowledgeable of the events of 'D' Day 1944 as they are of William the Conqueror's landing at Hastings in 1066. So, any of us who think our deeds or lack of them will live on when we are moulding in our graves, can think again. The memories scarcely survive one generation.

This brings me to 18th April, 1990 when I landed in Kupang, West Timor. An Irish passport and Australian citizenship was a little puzzling to the immigration officers. We straightened it out, thanks to their knowledge of English.

Being grey headed and apparently not quite the brightest are God given assets. The good Lord blessed me exceedingly on those two counts. I got out of countless awkward situations just by looking vague, tapping the table then my head, and saying "I don't know". In West Timor officialdom bent over backwards to make life easy for this old forlorn geriatric. The customs man said I could get a taxi into Kupang for 3,000 rupiah, but looking at my old pack, my big boots and my generally dilapidated appearance, he added "If you walk a kilometre or two you can get a bus into Kupang for 200 rupiah". I walked the two kilometres, a tout for one motel on my right side and a tout for another on my left side.

In 1942 I was ashore in Kupang for only about six hours and there was no difficulty in seeing most of it in that time. The men of the 2/40th and the attached units would not know the place now. With a population of about 120,000, it is noisy, teeming with people and full of life.

I decided to go to Soe, about 120 kilometres east of Kupang. The road through Soe, Kefa and on to Atambua must have been the way the 2/40th men came on their way to East Timor. Atambua is a big place now, with a population of about 60,000 if my information is correct. The magnificent Catholic Church is flanked by a convent school. Up the road, there is a government school and opposite this, a Muslim prayer house. The predominant religion is Protestant, with many Lutherans. Kupang and Atambua both have big Catholic populations. The Muslims would be mostly Javanese.

I left for East Timor the next day on the bus going to Maliana. My pre-1975 map was full of misinformation. No troubles in West Timor with the police, civil or military. In fact, I didn't see any of the latter. I didn't have to report anywhere and no-one wanted to see my passport. All that was about to change.

Atapupu is a fairly busy port these days, near the border with East Timor. There were three freighters tied up at the wharf. The road, a good one, runs down hill all the way from Atambua. It was the last I was to see until I got to Ermera. My acquaintance with the Indonesian military police commenced at Atapupu and was an ongoing and regular one all the time I was in East Timor.

By the time I got to Batugade, I had had to produce my passport three times, answer all the questions which were taken down and entered on the form used for this purpose, which I had to sign. At Balibo, I had to fill out five of such forms. Many of my difficulties with the military police arose from the fact that I had an Irish passport, claimed Australian citizenship, and the Gaelic and English on my passport puzzled many of them as well. Insufficient knowledge of their duties caused some strife too. If they just copied it down on a bit of paper, I could bet pounds to peanuts I'd be visited again. A very suspicious character in Aileu visited me three times for the same information. In Remexio they wanted to take my passport away. That's when I ceased to be docile, dumb and vague. "You are not taking my passport. You will bloody well leave it well and truly alone. Take me if you want to, but the passport stays with me". About ten minutes of heated argument convinced them.

Along the track between Remexio and Darilau was the nearest I came to having my pack searched and a personal search. The officer was connected by phone with his superior. I was kept about 20 minutes while they discussed me. I was allowed to continue.

In Ainaro I had two visits and experienced more suspicion. I was in Balibo two hours when I was pulled in off the road. I had left my passport at the Mission. This happened on my first day in East Timor and I thought that, as they had seen my passport and questioned me three times before I got to Balibo, they wouldn't worry me any more. I learned the rules of the game that day and made sure I contacted them first rather than be hauled up before them.

Batugade is a ramshackle place on the coast, with a background of glorious mountains. The road winds and twists its way up the range to Balibo. I jumped off the bus at the Mission which is about a kilometre north of the 'Posto' in a magnificent position. From the front steps of the church, the view extends all the way down to the coast and Batugade. One of the freighters I saw at Atapupu was sailing west. Bathed in the light of the blood-red sunset, a rusty old freighter was transformed into a Royal Yacht before darkness descended.

Not much is left of Balibo. The damaged buildings have been either erased or restored. A high tower is surmounted by the heroic figure of a Timorese rendering asunder the chains of Portuguese bondage and colonialism. Believe me, that chain has been replaced by an invisible cord, strangling the very life from a people cowed down by fear of the military might of Indonesia.

Crossing the border near Atapupu, I was back in the Timor we knew so well in 1942. Even by the time I got to Batugade, I could see the condition of the Timorese I met was even worse than it was in those days. The numerous Chinese community of Balibo is non-existent. Many Chinese were exterminated by the Indonesians in this area at about the same time as the journalists were murdered here.

The priest at Balibo is a big man with an engaging and pleasing personality. He speaks excellent English, attends to his pastoral duties and the education of his parishioners assiduously. From my observation, he looks after his people well.

Maliana is a fairly big place now, with a very busy market place. The Dili road goes through here. The whole plain is a rice bowl with cattle and water buffalo grazing on the unused rice paddies. There are many Indonesian settlers here. I took one look around and decided I would carry on to Bobonaro, although I was advised against going there.

Walking round like a headless chook in Maliana, seeking transport, I bumped into a man who wasn't frightened to speak Tetum. I asked in my best Tetum if I could get a lift with him to Bobonaro. I had myself a lift, and found out some more about the behaviour of the Indonesian troops. His father had been a Portuguese soldier who had stayed on when the Portuguese administration pulled out. He was killed fighting the Indonesians round Bobonaro. He left nothing to the imagination when describing the killings and the rapes. The gravel road was in very poor condition and much of it was almost washed away. It's a long climb up to Bobonaro from Maliana. It was my first time in this area (in 1942 the furthest west I got was Marobo, then up through Cailaco to Atsabe). The mountains rise sheer above the road and the rain came in torrents. I thought it was just as well we were over those rivers. The road into Bobonaro off the main road is not even a good bullock track; it was a quagmire. I expected to be bogged any minute, but he kept it going. Past the church on the hill and down into the 'Posto' itself. Bobonaro these days looks a forlorn, decaying huddle of buildings. The rain accentuated the dreariness and complete lack of vitality of the place. Bobonaro's days of glory are gone. The once fine stables of Timorese ponies no longer exist, but one can still note the blood line and breeding in the odd Timor pony one sees around here these days. I remember Neil Scott and myself taking a pack train of fifty *cudas* from Fatu-maquerec to Betano in September 1942. We would have to cover a lot of East Timor to find 50 ponies nowadays. One of the mysteries of Timor. Where have all the horses gone?

A wet, miserable day, bleak and cold. The military policeman insisted I stay with him and his wife. He was Balinese, his wife Javanese. He was 28 years of age, came to Timor in 1983 and has another three years to serve here before he returns to Bali. Two years there, then more than likely back to Timor.

The truck driver who took me in took me out on a fine clear morning. The mountain peaks stood out high and rugged in the clear mountain air, out on the main road. I looked across at Bobonaro and there, high up on the summit of the mountain behind the town, was a huge white cross, visible for miles. I looked up at it and then down the valley, thousands of feet below, ridged and ringed by towering mountain peaks, and above them all, the white cross, standing like a sentinel on the highest peak. It was symbolic for, in truth, the only protection the people of East Timor have today is represented by that cross - their cause kept alive by a few hundred resolute men facing enormous handicaps and odds. I felt a little more optimistic about East Timor's ultimate fate. That cross renewed much of my faith. The day seemed better, the scenery more beautiful. The truck was filling up with students for the primary and secondary school. What happens in East Timor in the future will depend on these youngsters. If Indonesia fails in its bid to capture the minds of the young, the men in the mountains will not have suffered, and in many cases died, in vain. The young will inherit the legends they create.

On up the valley towards the mountains facing us in the east, another police post, and five East Timorese are questioned for half an hour before we proceed. I just produced my passport and answered the usual questions. We head for Hatulia, now peopled mostly by Indonesians. I look around and think of Gerry Maley when he was wounded here back in 1942. I'd say there is far more undergrowth and timber on the surrounding hills today. Just as well the ridges are heavily timbered, otherwise this road would be completely washed away in many places. That's what's happening to the Bobonaro road, where the mountains are bare of timber. There are some really magnificent stands of timber on these mountain slopes, then miles of coffee plantations. Ermera is a much bigger place than when we were there, with many of the coffee plantation areas cleared and occupied by buildings. The road has improved immensely a few miles west of the town. The new single lane bridge across the Gleno, steel with timber decking, does not look nearly as impressive as the concrete bridge the sappers destroyed in 1942. Ermera, The Gleno, Three Spurs, Railaco and the mountains around hold vivid memories for Sections comprising the 2/2nd Independent Company, and particularly "C" Platoon.

Tibar, the coast and Dili coming up. Past the area of the Three Lakes and the huge flat area where the Pope said the Papal Mass on his visit to Timor. The altar, dais and balcony were a quick built, hurried job. They look impressive but will soon fall apart. The mountain background, the Three Lakes and the blue ocean to the north make an impressive scene - a fit place for the people of East Timor to demonstrate their faith and their negation of the laws of their new masters. The Pope was hardly clear of the island of Timor when the Indonesians moved in to vent their spleen on the East Timorese people.

Up early next morning, I took a stroll along the Dili waterfront. Heading back to the hotel for breakfast, some character let out a roar. I took no notice, so the roar got louder and more imperative. Still I took no notice, until the voice literally shook Dili. I looked around and there was this dapper, goggle-wearing bugger almost having a fit. I realised I was the reason. "Identity, identity", he shouted, with much arm waving. I wasn't happy either. "How did I know you wanted me? Here, take a look". I showed him my passport. He wasn't happy, so the same old rigmarole was gone through once more. He didn't ruin my breakfast. I cleared up everything and then headed for Aileu.

Aileu is bigger, but looking much the worse for wear. I caught a truck for Maubisse next morning. The road is not much different than in 1942. It is bitumen now but badly maintained. I looked around first at the end of the street - the high ground where the old school house had been. We stopped there for about three hours in 1942. Tom Nisbet decided to head for flea hill near Aileu at about 5.30 pm. Turned us into cavalry - Tom, Ray Aitken, Don Lacey, Norman Thornton, Geordie Smith and myself. The ride along the road was dark, bleak and with a howling wind, co-operative horses and unco-operative. Norman had the doyen of the latter. It stumbled, staggered and weaved its way along that road. The Japs could have heard Norm in Dili.

We came into Ainaro. There are more dwelling places now; more people, many Javanese. I was out of luck. The priest was in Dili visiting a sick brother so I had to look elsewhere for information. I found it in the guise of three young East Timorese who were interested spectators as I was being questioned for the second time by the military police. They gave me a further insight and further proof of the East Timorese desire to be independent. These were well educated young men - educated to a professional standard. They were highly critical of Australian policy with regards to East Timor, and in particular the so-called Timor Gap Treaty. To quote them, "This country and its resources belong to the people of East Timor, and are not for added wealth to nations already exceedingly wealthy". I could not disagree. Their argument is irrefutable.

At the bottom end of Ainaro is a Muslim Prayer House, and below that again the market place. The Muslim Prayer House says it all about the new Ainaro. Indonesian settlers are running all the businesses. Most buildings are shabby in appearance with no maintenance. In the old days they would have been sparkling white, but are nowadays begrimed, except for the Muslim Prayer House, the Church, School and Mission property. The military is well represented.

I got almost to Leletoe, called Lacado these days. Bill Holly, Alfredo De Santos and I went back to look for Bob Ewan in August 1942 and before the Jap withdrawals. Between Fatu-maquerec and Leletoe we met five Timorese and conscripted them for service (we hoped Bob may have only been wounded). They came, most unwillingly. We found Bob. He must have died instantly; shot practically straight through the heart. Strangely, most of the hair was cut from his head, and what looked like a bash from a rifle butt to the face was evident. As we buried him, it was the loneliest I ever felt anywhere. The only sound our bayonets as we scratched a hole out of the dry, hard earth. The whole land was eerily silent. The usual noises such as shouting children, cocks crowing, pigs grunting as they forage for food, all missing. A land without sound.

I had to return to Remexio. The next morning I left for Dili. The road follows the old Remexio track, past Ray Aitken's ambush site by the waterfall. Ray picked one of the best positions available to him along that track. He would have been cut off by any Jap force moving along another track higher up, which later joined the Remexio track. As it was, we just beat the Japs to the junction, thanks to the local man who risked his life to let us know a second force was moving along that track. I always think that ambush took place on a Sunday. Even as I sat on the hill looking down the track, I thought, "If you had any brains Paddy, you'd be back in North Sydney reading the Sunday papers". I was never noted for my brain power. Anyway, we knocked off a bundle of Japs and the Singapore tiger prowled no more. He would not have been pleased, were he to see the scraggy crew that sent him to his ancestors.

I was not happy being back in Dili. I took off for Baucau. The road was pretty good as far as Manatuto. Baucau was teeming with troops, marching students from primary to high school levels, smart and well turned out. Once fine buildings looked dilapidated and dirty. The Flamboyan hotel is used these days for interrogation and the torture of prisoners. The atmosphere around Baucau was not to my liking, so I set out for Viqueque. The old Portuguese road through Venilale and Ossu was no better than in 1942, and there was a heavy military presence all through this area. In Viqueque there was army galore, with huge vegetable gardens cleared and used by the Indonesian army. The red and white flag was flying from many buildings. It was an interesting place to be, and a dangerous one. I'd say there were spies and informers everywhere - the usual thing where an army is holding down a populace by might alone.

Back to Dili I went. Fortunately I met Rufino P., from what I can make out, the last of 4 Section's *criados*. Surrounded by his children and grand children, the years roll back. There they are - Nicolau, Rufino, Maubere, Dili, Patricia, Beremau, Africano - all laughing and joking, sharing the life of the '*soldado Australiano*'; the good times and the bad, the wet, the cold, the hunger and, I suppose, the fear. Rufino left. I wonder, does he ever think how this country and people abandoned them in 1975. Probably not. Nicolau would have. Nicolau died out in those mountains and I'll bet he well realised the 'Australianos' had abandoned them. It was sad seeing Rufino. He brought back so many memories and reminders of the men we lost in Timor.

I'm off to Suai on the south coast. This South Coast plain is a fertile area, with rice, corn, tobacco, fruit, cattle, buffalo and goats. How much the Timorese own, I don't know. Habitations run for miles, like a huge suburb. In Suai, a fairly large place and about the best kept place I've seen, the Balinese and Javanese run businesses. The priest is Timorese. Although it was night, he took me on a trip along the coast, down past where the Aussies were drilling for oil. They found it, and the well is spudded. The drillers can wax a bit fatter on Timor oil.

In East Timor I saw a population of second class citizens, picking up the crumbs the Indonesians throw their way. They are held in subjection by armed might alone. No love for their masters, no hope for themselves the way things are at present. No good jobs, no chance to run a business, with any protest resulting in arrest, beatings and torture. They are a frightened people but there's a great big 'but'. They haven't surrendered in their minds and hearts. The men still fighting in the mountains are the legends their future resistance will be based on. ✈

# August - September 1990

## "... Still Living in a Colonial Situation"

*Whilst Patsy Thatcher's account reports an air of relative calm and freedom of movement within East Timor, she and her five travelling companions, consisting of two Australians and three East Timorese, found the local population they encountered in late August to early September 1990 to be "...living in a colonial situation".*

The East Timorese members of our group were two women aged 50 and 65 years of age, and the son of one of the women aged 23 years. They were returning for the first time since fleeing from the civil war of 1975. The Australians were a 2nd 2nd Commando veteran (Brigadier Retired) returning for the first time since 1974, aged 72 years, and my husband and I who had never visited Timor before.

The Timorese members of our group felt it would be safer for them to stay at the Hotel Turismo with us, even though the policeman who filled in our permits made it very clear that they were free to stay with their families if they so wished, and in fact tried to persuade them to do so. The vast majority of Timorese who have visited East Timor since the opening up stay with their families without any problems whatsoever. However, when foreigners stay with or visit Timorese it is standard procedure for the family to receive a visit from the police after their departure to ascertain the nature of the visit. For example the *criado* of our Brigadier Retired, in anticipation of such a visit, requested 'the old soldier' write a letter stating the purpose of his visit and of his interest in this particular Timorese family so that it could be given to the police. This family had been visited earlier in the year by another ex 2nd 2nd soldier and this time they wanted to be prepared. Apparently these interviews are now usually conducted politely and as long as the explanation is rational and reasonable no further action is taken.

On several occasions, in Dili, European members of our group were approached by English speaking Timorese who wanted letters taken out of Timor and posted in Australia. These people often looked scared, would disappear quite suddenly and then reappear shortly after. One never knew quite why they disappeared or when they would reappear. They would talk about life on Timor and their particular problems, such as fear of the secret police (Intel), torture and imprisonment, lack of work opportunities and the difficulty of survival, having no citizens' rights (not allowed to have a passport, therefore unable to leave Indonesia; not allowed to make telephone calls outside of Indonesia; not allowed to complete their studies and so on). In my experience these were always young males, who claimed to have been imprisoned, beaten and tortured for having taken part in student protests. The only other European tourist (a young New Zealander) we met reported similar happenings. He was given an English copy of an Amnesty International report on Human Rights Violations in East Timor. This lad had travelled widely in Indonesia and felt Dili was a cleaner and more pleasant town than most he had been in. Being approached in this clandestine way appealed to him. He said, "It makes the place more exciting and gives a bit of spice to the holiday!".

*Orphan children, East Timor, 1991 (Photograph: Hugh O'Shaughnessy)*

On arrival at the Hotel Turismo, it does not take long to become aware of who the Intel agents are. One is a Mr Carlos, a tall man with a small moustache, the second, a very handsome Maccassae man called Faustino Jeronimo Soares. One or the other is usually at the bar and they politely show interest in your plans and your reasons for coming to East Timor. Both speak reasonable English. We adopted the attitude of being completely open in regard to why we were in East Timor. The ex soldier was there to meet up with his old friend from the 2nd World War years, I to further my interest in matters anthropological, my husband to see a new country and our Timorese companions to see their families. From personal experience Mr Carlos at least checks on who visits you and why. He is not at all subtle, and was arrogant enough to question, in Portuguese, the English-speaking cleaner in my presence over a visitor I had, for which he received a bit of 'old boiler' Australian arrogance in return!

Much has been said about the roads in East Timor. Certainly they are very narrow and not of the standard that we in Australia are used to. We were travelling on them towards the end of the dry season when they would be at their optimum. In the main they are in reasonable condition; certainly there is a lot of roadwork going on. The road to Baucau is sealed and, apart from a small section, in quite good condition. The section that is questionable is on a particularly windy part of the coast which will require more sophisticated engineering that the rest of the road. There is evidence (i.e. surveyors at work, retaining walls under construction) that it is only a matter of time before this bit will also be finished. This was also the situation on the roads to Aileu, Bazartete and Ossu.

Another concern of Timorese in Australia has been to what extent there has been logging of trees. Currently no one is allowed to cut Teak trees or Sandalwood trees in Timor. At Lospalos, Baucau, Viqueque and on the road to Aileu we saw plenty of fairly mature Teak trees. No one in our party, nor anyone I spoke to, reported seeing any signs of systematic logging. An Australian official from AIDAB, in Timor assessing the relevance of various irrigation schemes for an aid project to be financed by the Australian government, whom I spoke to briefly in Dili, also confirmed that logging if any has been minuscule. He had seen no evidence on his travels over the island. He pointed out that problems, mainly due to the terrain, associated with felling and getting the timber out, are horrendous and he doubted it would be financially viable.

There are soldiers everywhere. In all of the major towns and in the smaller towns the size of Laga, Laivai and Ossu for example, there are garrisons of troops. Generally speaking there appeared to be accommodation for about 250 in each. There are reports that in each of the *sucos* there are also small numbers of troops stationed; we were told 2 or 3 in the Sucos around Lospalos. At smaller places such as Bazartete and Dare we saw two soldiers on duty at each village. Based on what we saw in terms of accommodation, supply trucks etc, and allowing for soldiers in the bush out of sight (several Timorese told us there were many soldiers in the bush away from the roads), we calculated somewhere in the vicinity of 10,000 but almost certainly not more than 18,000 troops.

On the road between Manatuto and Baucau we saw many armed soldiers standing along the side of the road, one about every kilometre. In this same vicinity we saw people harvesting rice surrounded by armed soldiers. On the road between Aileu and Same there were many armed soldiers. In one area they were picking up or carrying construction type timber.

Trucks, used in addition to old buses to transport people long distances, always seemed to have at least one armed soldier in them. As a tourist I would ask the question of everybody, "Why are so many soldiers needed on Timor?" Either there was no answer or I was told, "There are a few bandits in the hills and people have to be protected." My rejoinder to the Intel men at the Hotel, that Timorese bandits must be exceptionally clever if it required so many soldiers to keep them under control, was met with a smile and predictably no further comment.

We did not see much military hardware apart from automatic rifles on all soldiers; revolvers and truncheons graced the person of every military policeman we saw. We saw six helicopters on the airfield at Dili and another two at Baucau. One helicopter was circling the mountains south of Aileu whilst we were there; another circled over Dili for at least two hours on another day. There appeared to be no other military aircraft apart from the helicopters. We did not see the airport at Lospalos but there was a helicopter in the air when we arrived there about 3.30 pm in the afternoon. Three light armoured vehicles were seen. One on the road to Ermera, one in the region of Bobonaro and the other between Manatuto and Baucau. All over the island there were many military trucks ferrying troops or supplies.

The people in the town of Manatuto appeared to be very tense. There were no smiles when we stopped at the market there and no children came near us. None of the rumours which abound in Dili gave any clue to why the Manatuto area was so tense. An Australian woman friend who visited Timor four weeks before us also reported tension and an over abundance of troops in this area.

We were struck by the number of overcrowded cemeteries on the Baucau-Viqueque road. There seemed to be proportionately more there than we saw elsewhere. This may be due to the greater concentration of people living in this extremely fertile region, or perhaps there are more Catholics living in this region. My understanding of the Lulik religion is that people are usually buried on their own land and it is only Christians who are buried in formal cemeteries. Therefore one would expect that the bulk of the population, at least until 1976, would not have been buried in formal cemeteries. We did not walk through these cemeteries to test out that assumption as we did not want to attract attention to ourselves by appearing to have a hidden agenda. (It so happened that the private car we were travelling in had been hired for us from the Chief of Intel in Dili! The driver was from Sumba. If one indulged in conspiracy theories, it could be argued we were effectively under surveillance all of the time!).

In terms of rumours, exaggerated stories etc, Dili conforms to the pattern found in any country where there is censorship and an oppressive administration. On the 4th of September, a group of us attended an outdoor Mass held at Lecidere in Dili to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Diocese. Our military expert (Brigadier Retired) estimated the attendance at about 20,000. He based this estimate on his knowledge of Collingwood Football Crowd numbers! (No one can accuse us of being unscientific in our observations!). The Intel man, Mr Soares, claimed there were 32,000 but omitted to tell us what he used as measurement. The numbers of people attending was surprising. Our Timorese friends reported that Timorese women and children were being told to stay away because a big demonstration from students was expected and it was anticipated, based on the way Indonesian authorities had reacted in the past, it would be unsafe.

It was difficult to gauge if the people had enough to eat. No Timorese we saw were plump, but none demonstrated the commonly accepted physical signs of acute starvation. Many of the women, especially those in the country or poorer urban women with many children, looked malnourished. So did the very few old people we saw. The Timorese members of our group, who ate most of their meals at the homes of various relatives in Dili, reported a diet consisting of a miniscule amount of meat or fish, few vegetables, little fruit and a lot of rice. They thought the diet very poor compared to that normally eaten up until 1975. We visited four markets; Dili, Manatuto, Baucau and Viqueque. In each, the amount of fruit and vegetables for sale was very small and of poor quality. Whether this is because it was late in the dry season or because there is not enough food being grown, I cannot say. The people selling the fruit and vegetables were Timorese. The people selling dry goods, toiletries, gadgets, hardware lines, clothing etc, appeared to be Bugis (people from Sulawesi), Javanese and Chinese.

Although we saw plenty of rice paddy either under cultivation or recently harvested, we also saw a lot of paddy, particularly in the regions of Baucau and Viqueque that obviously had not been used for some years. Perhaps because the irrigation system for some reason is not adequate, or because there are not enough people to farm the area. We were struck by the fact that in both these areas there seemed to be an absence of males older than the middle thirties.

In Dili, at the site of the old market, there was an educational exhibition. There were pavilions giving information and attempting to educate the general public. For example there was one manned by police, one by the army, one by the Airforce (Red Berets) and so on. Various weapons, models of aircraft and ships, examples of other types of equipment such as jungle rations etc used in Timor, were displayed together with information about locations of personnel. Civil projects undertaken by the military and information on a variety of other projects which the military had an interest in were displayed. At the Police pavilion a policeman answered questions, and on display in writing were the rights of individuals if arrested. Information on what sort of problems people should report to the police was publicised, together with requests to help the police in their work. At a pavilion giving information on Transmigration there were many photographs showing various transmigration settlements. The photographs tended to confirm the impression that the majority of the settlements were not successful. The claim was made that no transmigrants are currently arriving. Presumably for the same reason they have been discontinued in other parts of Indonesia. The *Transmigrasi* settlements photographed were at Bobonaro, Salele, Beco, Baucau and the largest at Suai. We saw the one at Baucau which certainly did not appear viable. It obviously has stopped as evidenced by the number of partially constructed houses on plots of land not being worked. The plots that were occupied were in poor condition, with little growing on them.

The settlement at Suai, peopled mainly by Balinese transmigrants, is apparently quite successful. Those migrants appear to be there to stay. A Balinese man told me with obvious pride that a temple had been built and things were going well.

From my observations, it appears that the majority of Timorese continue to exist at subsistence level, most being farmers. Those in the urban areas lucky enough to get work usually seem to be doing menial work. Coffee appears to be the only major cash crop, in spite of there being very few areas suitable for its production. We saw no sign of any industrial development. We were told at Lospalos of two proposed developments that had been researched with technicians coming to the area etc, but nothing came of them. We were told in Dili that the Japanese are building a hotel at Tutuala, but people at Lospalos said, if true, then building has not commenced yet.

The University of *Timor Timur* which is not financed by the Central Government but by PEMDA (regional government of Timor) is affiliated with the prestigious Gadjah Mada University (sister university to Monash University in Melbourne). The University of Timor Timur offers four courses; Agricultural science, English, Bahasa Indonesia and of all things Politics; (the mind boggles at the thought of three years of *Panca Sila* ideology and one wonders what sort of occupation it would lead to!) My gut impression is that the standard at this University (it is only 4 years old) is lower than other parts of Indonesia. Indonesian settlers and the wealthy Timorese send their children to universities in Indonesia. We were told few, if any, graduates get jobs. One rarely sees Portuguese or Timorese names on the name tags of people working in the many bureaucracies such as banks, telecommunications office, post offices, or the higher ranks of military police. Similarly Portuguese or Timorese names do not seem to appear often in commerce. Restaurants and shops appear to be mainly Chinese owned, most of whom did not speak Tetum so were presumably Indonesian. These observations tend to support the contention that few Timorese graduates obtain employment.

Conversely the Technical College at Fatumaca offers useful courses to Timorese students only, which up to the present have enabled graduates to obtain employment. However, unless some industry is commenced soon employment opportunities for those graduates will dry up. This college, originally commenced in 1964 by Father Locatelli from virtually virgin bush, is quite remarkable. The second language to Tetum taught at this college is English, because it's the language of the text books of the trade courses it offers. The courses taught are motor mechanics, carpentry, electrical engineering and electronics. We were told that over 500 families live from the various occupations created from the college. It was the only place we saw large scale farm equipment such as tractors etc.

Noticeably, in all of the towns we visited there were large numbers of young men sitting around or aimlessly walking the streets. We were told that most of them are graduates from secondary or tertiary colleges, but that there are no jobs for them. Some of them are from other parts of Indonesia because several approached us, to practice their English and told us they had come to Dili to seek work.

There is some (non Chinese) Timorese entrepreneurship. Particularly in the Viqueque region, we saw several small kiosks run by Timorese. A possible explanation for Timorese enterprise in this district may be due to the fact that this region has a reputation for heavy guerilla activity and was opened up much later than the rest of Timor. Conceivably migrants from other parts of Indonesia may have chosen to stay away because they were fearful of the unsettled conditions.

We were warned by many people if moving around Dili at night to go by taxi because it was unsafe. We were told there was currently friction between rival gangs of Timorese and Indonesian youths. Twice when we ventured out on the streets at night, we were quickly accosted by English speaking locals who would call a cab and issue us into it quickly, telling us to return to the hotel. However, other European guests at the Hotel said there was no danger.

People at Lospalos told us when they are sick they go to the Nuns for help. They said there is no point going to the hospital because for a start they are not treated either caringly or well and in any case there is no medicine there. The Nuns told us that money was the only restriction on what and how much medicine they could get. They are supplied by relatives of their Mother Superior, who is Italian. People who approach the Nuns for help and can afford to pay do so, whilst others are given medicine and treatment free. The major health problem in the Lospalos area is tuberculosis. Meagre and poor diet, the Nuns said, was a major contributing factor. Part of the diet problem was due to the recent troubled past, but also due to the intransigence of the locals in changing their diet to more nutritious foods. Many people suffering from the disease were without medication because they were either too ill or lived too far away to attend for treatment. The authorities are making no attempt to tackle this problem so the nuns are trying to do so. However, they have no transport to distribute medicine.

In conclusion, it seemed to us, that by whatever set of variables one cares to measure the situation in Timor by, it is clear the people are living in an oppressive colonial situation. What is also apparent is that the Indonesians are embarking on another one of their 'win the hearts and minds' campaigns. Whether this is due to the findings of the seminar organised by Gadjah Mada University early in 1990 and attended by senior military officials including deputy armed forces chief of staff and the commander of the military region from Bali to Timor, or a response to outside political pressure regarding human rights, is difficult to determine. ✈

# February 1991

## A Speech to the Australian Parliament

*In February 1991, Labour Member for Moreton, Garrie Gibson, participated in an Australian parliamentary delegation to Indonesia at the invitation of the Indonesian Parliament. At the request of the Australians, the delegation spent three days in East Timor as part of that visit.*

Our trip to Indonesia generally was a positive and worthwhile exercise and the members of our delegation learnt a great deal in their discussions with Indonesian Ministers, politicians and officials about trade and investment opportunities. We canvassed improved tourism and educational links between our two nations. We were well received throughout our eight day stay in Indonesia and our hosts were friendly, cooperative and helpful.

My concerns about Indonesia's actions in East Timor and my opposition to its incorporation in no way reduces my belief that Australia and Indonesia need to continue to develop close working relationships for our two nations' mutual benefit. I respect Indonesia's efforts to improve the social and economic conditions of its people. I do, however, have very strong objections to their actions in East Timor and will continue my efforts to gain freedom, justice and the right to self-determination for the people of East Timor. My visit in February to East Timor confirmed the fact that Indonesia is able to maintain its control over the territory only through a heavy military presence and acts of brutality against the people.

Our delegation had meetings with the Catholic Bishop of Dili, Bishop Belo, with representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and with Australian journalists who had met with Fretilin representatives. They all confirmed, in some detail, that human rights abuses including harassment, arrest without trial, beatings, torture and disappearances of suspected activists are still regular events. Their information confirmed reports we had received from Amnesty International. Even the Indonesian appointed Governor of East Timor, Mr Carrascalao, confirmed in private discussions that his efforts to rebuild the economic and social fabric of East Timor were constantly undermined with the brutal repression of the Indonesian military.

Our delegation was given little opportunity to talk with local people and to hear their views on the current situation and whether they would choose to stay as part of Indonesia. We were continuously supervised by a number of military, intelligence and Government officials wherever we travelled. Our hotel in Dili was surrounded at all times by security forces, and if any member of the delegation left the hotel to walk the local streets - I did on four separate occasions - he was followed by three or four intelligence officers. The local people would not even look at us when we walked past. They knew that their every movement was watched.

Hundreds of troops were on the streets of Dili for the whole of our visit. It was reported to us by Bishop Belo that a number of leaders of the resistance movement had been rounded up and imprisoned just before our arrival. We had expected a demonstration to occur during our visit, but the presence of security forces was so heavy that I was not surprised that none occurred.

East Timor's whole environment reeks of occupation and suppression. There is no social community activity or willingness to engage freely in conversation or recreation. The economy is massively depressed. Health problems are still widespread, with malaria and other diseases prevalent. There is no reliable water supply or proper drainage. The Government is still reliant on 95 per cent of its income from Indonesia to develop community infrastructure and facilities.

I have always opposed the successive Australian Governments' position on East Timor, and my trip in February confirmed the correctness of this position. Australia's consent to the invasion and annexation of East Timor and, therefore, its acceptance of the suppression, torture and murder of its citizens is a disgraceful act for which we have been criticised around the world. This policy is in total contradiction to the often stated principles and tenets of our foreign policy. As a free, peaceful, progressive and democratic society, Australia has taken strong stands on innumerable occasions in support of these fundamental objectives.

We have allowed oil and its economic benefits to corrupt our foreign policy and we stand condemned in the eyes of the free world because of this action. The people of East Timor will continue to struggle for their rights to live as a free, independent nation. I shall continue to fight for their right to the future they wish to enjoy. Australia will continue to suffer the criticism of its peers until it changes its position on this territory. ✈

*Excerpted from a speech to the Australian Parliament, April 17, 1991.*

# April 1991

## The Changing Colour of East Timor's Struggle

*The failure of the East Timorese people to accept their integration with Indonesia continues to be the fundamental challenge facing the government, military and church authorities, writes the British author of the following account.*

I travelled without restriction into East Timor from Bali via Kupang. In practice it was rather easier than expected to preserve a degree of anonymity. I spoke no useful languages. As a result I was incapable of advanced conversation. Frustrating at the time, this was perhaps a canny way to travel. East Timor is a highly controlled society, where politics remain extremely dangerous. It was wise as well as useful to begin conversations at the beginning, without presumption. A stranger, alone and speechless, I could not signal whose side I was on. If those I met cared to speak to me, they were forced to signal very basic messages. As a result, I feel rather sure of some of the simple observations I made - more sure than I could have been if I had been guided or articulate.

I assumed that my possessions would be searched at some point. They were searched, in fact, on my third day, while I was travelling to Atambua. As far as I know, only one document was taken. It was subsequently confirmed to me that my room had been searched by the army. The person who told me was visibly anxious; this was one of the occasions when the danger that accompanies any dissident activity became apparent.

Two female companions and I climbed Mount Ramelau - Timor's highest peak. Before we set out we learned that General Sutrisno, Commander in Chief of Indonesia's armed forces, would arrive two days later in Ramelau to support the troops on mission in the area. About one hour after we reached the top, an officer dressed in sports clothes and without arms, and two militiamen, both armed with unmodern rifles, arrived on the summit to escort us down. They did escort us down, in some order at the start, and then in more relaxed fashion. Our guess was the officer fancied talking to the women; but he did say that we were in a security zone, and that they wanted to make sure we were all right.

When I first walked around Dili, I was struck by its dilapidated, untended appearance. I was a little shocked by my reaction: what had I expected? With time, I became more aware of the large number of new administrative buildings in the town. If I picture Dili now, I see images of neglect and poverty overlaid by rows of white government offices and barracks busy with young men in camouflage. As a summary of the occupation, it is not altogether inaccurate.

The barracks are busy places: the men inside can be seen polishing vehicles, walking errands, washing themselves and their clothes; outside them, little platoons demonstrate their social utility by cutting the grass. But Dili's muted street life showed the economy could not support a large administration. What could so many officials in so many offices be doing? The Timorese call them Battalion 702 - they start at seven, do nothing until 2 and then go home.

In most places I would be addressed by a teacher or a policeman or a soldier from Flores, Java or Kupang. The effect was to distance me from Timorese, who visibly stood back while these encounters took place. This happened so often that it became significant. It tended to confirm reports that 'incomers' dominate the economy of Dili; and it reinforced a first impression, which grew with the days, that the Timorese are subordinate, even marginalised, in their own country. If they are poor as well, as most rural Timorese are, they are doubly excluded.

As far as I was personally concerned, I did not detect the sort of political climate that I assume existed between 1976 and 1980, and during much of the 1980s. I would not say that the people of East Timor are living, as they did live, in a climate of generalised terror in which they suffer numerous and frequent acts of arbitrary repression.

At the same time, it is clear that many people have recently been arrested on political grounds, that detainees suffer torture and other abuses, and that aggressive military operations involving large numbers of troops have been taking place in Ainaro and in other parts of central East Timor.

Every Timorese to whom I talked about self-determination, including those who accept integration as a fait accompli, agreed that the great majority of Timorese are unreconciled to Indonesian rule and would change their political status if they could. A senior foreign priest took the same view, though he regarded this aspiration as quite unrealistic.

The Timorese refusal to accept integration remains the fundamental challenge confronting the army, the government, the church and key economic and social institutions in East Timor.

It must be assumed, I believe, that the Indonesian authorities have access to excellent intelligence, including intelligence about the nationalist movement. I was told that numerous people are employed, willingly or not, as informers. It was also implied that informers have penetrated high-ranking circles in the nationalist movement. Those I met in positions of authority seemed to me to take for granted that they were subject to the attention of informants; significantly, their response appeared not to be to try to prevent such surveillance, but to make use of the space for the personal expression that their status permitted.

What was black-and-white is now grey. A murderous military conflict has been superceded by a political manipulation that is almost as dangerous - at least for some of the players - but is almost invisible to the casual view. In sum, the Indonesian authorities believe that in the long term they can co-opt Timorese nationalism into submission; whereas the nationalists believe they can play the same game longer and better and emerge in the end with a stronger hand than their enemy. Beneath the ceaseless political negotiation and exchange is the ever present threat of violence. Used when it is useful for effect, or when the political management fails, it continues to cause the deaths of dozens of Timorese and also Indonesian soldiers each year. ✈

# IN BRIEF . . . .

## Mid-1989, "Jacinta", Australia

I am an East Timorese who has been in Australia since 1975, and now that East Timor is open I returned to visit in the middle of 1989.

What surprised me most in Timor was no birds. Before we had an ugly bird we called 'ca coa' because that was the noise it made. Every morning at 4am that bird would sing. We called it the Timorese clock, to wake you. Never one in all the weeks I was there! I saw none of the fat pigeons we used to eat. In the afternoons no flocks of cockatoos come. Also the monkeys - travelling from Manatuto to Baucau we always used to see them running on the road. Now none.

On the Lois river plain they have settled many Indonesians who came in boatloads in 1988 after a storm or earth quake on one of their islands.

When I was in the east, twice a day two Indonesian jets would fly over looking. To me it was very frightening when they came. There were military helicopters at the airport. Holiday films developed in Timor had the pictures I took of military aircraft missing. ✈

## August 1989, Anonymous, Holland

The atmosphere is extremely tense. It is not possible for a foreigner to hold a conversation about life in East Timor in which the other does not sooner or later come out with a strong political statement: either pro- or anti-Indonesian. This requires no provocation except an unwillingness at times to accept what is obviously a party line. A truck driver who had Indonesian soldiers on board proclaimed loudly how he had been mistreated by Fretilin, and how different this behaviour was from that of the 'gentlemen' of Indonesia. But when pressed to tell more, he suddenly looked depressed and said: "I only want to make a living. I am afraid, that is why I told you that fib just now. I once took some foreigners around, and afterwards I was interrogated for several days without food". The rest of the trip passed in painful silence.

East Timorese are traditionally warm and hospitable. But now they dare not entertain foreign visitors, in case they are interrogated about it afterwards. Their pain is that what is a duty to them is made impossible by fear. One priest commented over and over: "The atmosphere here is oppressive. You just live here for 2 or 3 months and you will feel how it is". A visiting Javanese academic, after an absence of 8 years, spoke about the 'psychology of fear', and expressed disappointment that "so little has changed since 1981". ✈

## December 1990, Anonymous (photographer), New Zealand

Travelling anywhere outside of Dili was not simple or cheap. I was only permitted to go further eastward if I was granted a travel permit by the Dili police. This took some negotiating, and they were adamant that I should not travel for more than a few days at a time without returning for further approval. I was also required to commission the services of a police approved 'guide' as a companion for the duration.

My 'guide' made it very clear to me that his role was to record and report my every activity to the police. We were also required to present ourselves physically to every police station that we passed by on our route. At each stop I would be questioned, and my papers examined, checked, and eventually stamped.

For obvious reasons the presence of my guide was somewhat of a hindrance when it came to photographing many subjects of interest. I found it necessary to slip away at times, or distract his attention (he was particularly partial to free beer), to give myself the time that I needed.

I was told endlessly (both by frightened locals and soldiers) that I must under no circumstances photograph the military. On occasion, when caught flagrante delicto, soldiers became aggressive to the point of grabbing my camera. Though stopped and briefly detained many times, I never had any film confiscated. ✈

## May 1991, Representative of a British Non-Governmental Organisation

In Suai I visited the in-shore oil well, bored by an Australian oil company just before the Indonesian invasion in 1975. Fresh oil seepage is present around the neck of the well which is situated just 30 metres from the long sandy beach. A long string of beach huts, owned by the army and used as a holiday venue for off-duty troops, 'guards' either side of the oil well. It is said locally that when the valve of the well is opened, the oil pressure creates a spout rising some 40 to 50 metres into the air. Both in-shore and off-shore oil is present, and it is rumoured that this represents an oil reserve equal to that of Brunei. Due to the uncertainty over the international legal status of East Timor and the local security situation, the oil already existing has not yet been exported. However, a local priest talked to me of frequent visits by Australian 'engineers' and plans to build a local beach hotel complex, ostensibly to house international oil workers and their families.

In Portuguese times a journey to the southern town of Suai, approximately 150 km from Dili, was said to have taken at least a week by horse. Now the journey takes 6 - 8 hours, if you are lucky enough to get a direct bus, or two days via Atambua (West Timor). There are substantial bridges being built on the road to Suai which could mean further reductions in travel time by the end of this year. While on my bus journey to Suai via Atambua, I spoke with a Timorese graduate economist from Jakarta's Catholic university. I asked him whether the local Timorese appreciate the considerable improvement in transport links. He replied that, while most local people benefited from the Indonesian infrastructure development, they would always 'choose freedom and no roads'. There is no feeling of local 'ownership' of these development projects. ✈

## August 1991, Australian lawyer from Darwin

In August 1991 a friend and I made a six day visit to East Timor. Dili, with its wide, pleasant streets, is a garrison town, crowded with Indonesian soldiers. There is an atmosphere of suspicion and fear. A few East Timorese were prepared to speak privately of their passionate wish for freedom. Open protest is dangerous. I was told that a group of students involved in anti-Indonesian demonstrations during the visit of the American Ambassador in

1990, and who had taken refuge with the Catholic Vicar-General in Dili, had been arrested in February 1991. Some were said to have disappeared and were feared murdered.

During our stay a party of a dozen or so Indonesians checked into our hotel. I was told they were security police sent to swell the local force in advance of the arrival of a Portuguese parliamentary delegation. Round-ups and arrests were expected in an attempt to prevent any recurrence of the embarrassing demonstrations which greeted the visit of the American Ambassador last year.

Leaving Dili, we travelled south across the mountains to Same. Armed soldiers and militia in ones or twos were a common sight in the villages along the road. Around Same there were large numbers of combat soldiers travelling the roads in trucks or patrolling on foot. At one point our driver slowed as we approached a group of thirty or forty soldiers and an armoured car. I took a photograph. There was an outburst of shouting from the soldiers. We were ordered to stop and I was told to get out of the car. An angry soldier confronted me. After I had apologised profusely and our driver had been questioned, we were allowed to continue.

Once we arrived in Same we were obliged to report to the police headquarters to obtain a permit to visit the area. As we arrived at the headquarters a squad of about 30 police were on parade. Automatic rifles leaned in a rack nearby. My friend and I were questioned for half and hour before obtaining a permit. Our guide, who was separately questioned, was warned that no photographs were allowed.

Travelling on to the south coast we passed through a large village. Here we saw a recently built school which appeared abandoned. There were few signs of Indonesian presence in the village other than a thatch hut with an Indonesian flag outside and two armed soldiers walking between the houses. Although it was late afternoon, people were keeping to their houses and there were few people to be seen on the road. This seemed unusual in an Asian village. I suspected the village was insecure for the Indonesians and subject to a curfew. A few kilometres before this village, we had seen a bivouac of about 50 Indonesian soldiers beside the road. Shortly before dusk we passed the bivouac again. The camp was deserted and I guessed the soldiers were conducting night-time patrols in the area.

I believe there are five Indonesian combat battalions in the south, spread across a wide area from Ainaro in the west through Same and Viqueque to Los

Palos in the east; perhaps five thousand men in all, suggesting Fretilin force of some hundreds is operating.

I am convinced there is widespread support for Fretilin in East Timor and great hatred and fear of the Indonesians.

The East Timorese people, sixteen years after the Indonesian invasion, are still fighting to be free.

Australia has encouraged talks between the factions in Cambodia and sent human rights delegations to China. All this is posturing and hypocrisy unless we recognise the continuing bloodshed and abuses in East Timor. We must, at least, do everything we can to get the Indonesians to stop the killing and repression and to sit down with the East Timorese resistance. ✈

# GLOSSARY

| | |
|---|---|
| **Criado** | Servant (Portuguese). East Timorese assistants of Australian forces fighting the Japanese during the 2nd World War |
| **Intel** | Indonesia's secret police / intelligence forces |
| **Kabupaten** | Indonesian government administrative division, headed by a *Bupati* |
| **Losmen** | Cheap form of Indonesian accommodation, often a room or rooms set apart from a family home |
| **Panca Sila** | The five principles of Indonesian state ideology |
| **Suco** | Traditional East Timorese village |
| **Surat Jalan** | Travel permit, often required for travel to various places in East Timor |
| **Tais** | Traditional woven Timorese cloth |
| **Tetum** | Indigenous lingua franca of East Timor |
| **Tim Tim** | Abbreviation of the Indonesian 'Timor Timur', meaning East Timor |

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